

I believe every nurse has his or her own challenges to overcome when confronted with situations that they feel unqualified to handle. As my instructors frequently point out, we are only human. This memorable challenge came to me early in my student nursing career during my maternal/newborn rotation at the University of Michigan Hospital. It had only been 18 months since I had been a patient there myself. I had a scheduled c-section, but unfortunately I became one of the 1 in 8000 who suffer permanent nerve damage from the placement of the epidural catheter.¹ This was not something I wanted to relive, but that is what began to happen to me mentally. Every time I saw or heard about a mother getting an epidural anesthetic I was filled with dread that something terrible would happen. Every week my confidence in my ability to be a nurse was waning. I began having trouble sleeping the night before clinicals.

Then, during the 5th week of the clinical rotation, I was assigned to attend a scheduled c-section. I immediately began to feel anxious. The operating room was the same one I had been in for my own surgery. When the patient was being transported into the OR I began to panic. I grabbed my fellow nursing student's arm and told her that I couldn't do this. I truly believed that I would pass out. She suggested that I find a chair and just sit through the entire process. That is exactly what I planned to do until I looked up and noticed that the patient was alone except for the anesthesiologists working behind her. She was crying silently with tears streaming down her face. It was then that I realized how selfish I had been acting. "This is not about me!" I thought

and I walked over to the patient and asked her if she would like to hold my hand. She grabbed it and held it so tight and she said, "I just hate needles." I stayed with her until her husband was in the room. From that point on I was able to take an active role in what was going on. I watched as the baby was delivered and found myself overcome with emotion. It was truly amazing to witness.

When we were back in the recovery room there was a definite difference in my relationship to the patient. I was more confident and less anxious. She also seemed to have more trust in me. I thanked her and her husband for allowing me to be present for the birth of their baby and she took my hand and said, "Thank you for being there."

Although I do not intend to work in mother/baby nursing, the clinical rotation forced me to confront issues that needed to be resolved in order for me to be a better nurse. I am once again confident that I am on the right career path.

Susan Dible